



# Elections Division of Colorado Secretary of State's Office

## Colorado Election Fact Sheet

### Post-Election Audits Overview

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#### 1) Introduction

Colorado conducts bipartisan post-election audits to ensure election outcomes are accurate. These audits are known as risk-limiting audits or RLAs. In addition to all the measures taken before and during the election to secure the voting process, an audit ensures to a high degree of certainty that election outcomes are correct. For example, if the risk limit is set at 4% for a particular RLA, there is at least a 96% probability that the audit itself will discover and correct an incorrect outcome before results are officially certified. The number of ballots required to conduct an audit of any particular contest varies based on the margin of the contests selected and the risk limit. The smaller the margin, the more ballots to audit. The smaller the risk limit, the more ballots to audit.

#### 2) Ensuring the Accuracy of the Election Through Public Bipartisan Post-Election Audits

a) **Colorado Conducts Bipartisan Post-Election Audits.** The statewide audit is conducted by bipartisan election judges in each county to verify election outcomes before any results are officially certified. After Election Day, the Secretary of State's Office selects at least one statewide contest and at least one contest in each county to audit.<sup>i</sup> A variety of contests are selected to ensure the audit reaches a sufficient number of races and ballots, with input from Republican and Democratic county clerks and Secretary of State office career staff. Once the target contests are selected, every county prepares for the RLA by uploading the following to Colorado's open source RLA system: (1) the ballot manifest, which tracks the storage location of each individual scanned paper ballot; and (2) the cast vote record file, which is a data file that shows how the county's voting system counted each and every scanned paper ballot. The Secretary of State's Office then convenes a public meeting to set a random seed (series of 20 numbers determined by [dice roll](#)), which ultimately determines the specific ballots that each county must audit.<sup>ii</sup> The Secretary of State's career staff then identifies the statewide and county target contests in the RLA system, and inputs the random 20-digit seed, and launches the audit. The system then generates a list of the randomly selected paper ballots that must be retrieved and examined by each county audit board. This RLA audit system [is open and available for anyone's review](#). The system is completely

separate from any other voting equipment or manufacturer. See the Colorado Secretary of State's website for [RLA Questions and Answers](#) for more information.

- b) Audits are conducted by bipartisan election judges.** The audit is conducted by a bipartisan team of election judges in each county, known as the audit board. First, the county audit board downloads the list of specific ballots randomly selected for the audit in their county. The audit board then locates and retrieves those specific ballots from their sealed storage containers. In performing this task, the audit board must verify that the randomly selected ballots' chain of custody is correctly documented and intact. Then, the audit board reviews each audited ballot and enters the votes they observe into the RLA system. After the audit board finishes auditing all the selected ballots, the program compares how the judges recorded the voters' choices from the paper ballot compared to the tabulation as reflected in the county's cast vote record. If there are discrepancies in this process, the audit board will be required to examine additional randomly selected ballots in further audit rounds until the risk limit is satisfied for all contests. If the risk limit is never satisfied, a full hand count would be conducted. This has never occurred.
- c) Every Colorado election has passed this bipartisan audit.** Colorado has conducted post-election audits after every state and federal election since 2005. Risk limiting audits have been conducted since 2017. Every RLA has confirmed the outcome of the election. In each of these, the results in every state and federal election were confirmed with high statistical confidence using the risk-limiting audit procedures.
- d) Bipartisan Board Approves Final Election Results.** Republican and Democratic Party Chairs appoint representatives to approve each county's election results. This group is known as the canvass board. Following the audit, the canvass board meets to approve the election results in each county. The canvass board reconciles the number of ballots counted to the number of ballots cast, and reconciles the number of ballots cast to the number of voters who voted.<sup>iii</sup> No county is permitted to canvass its election results until all counties successfully pass Colorado's first-in-nation risk-limiting audit.<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> C.R.S. 1-7-515; 8 C.C.R. 1505-1 § 25.2.2(j)

<sup>ii</sup> C.R.S. 1-7-515; 8 C.C.R. 1505-1 § 25.2.2(i)

<sup>iii</sup> C.R.S. Title 1, Article 10; 8 C.C.R. 1505-1 §§ 10.1-10.8

<sup>iv</sup> 8 C.C.R. 1505-1 §10.4